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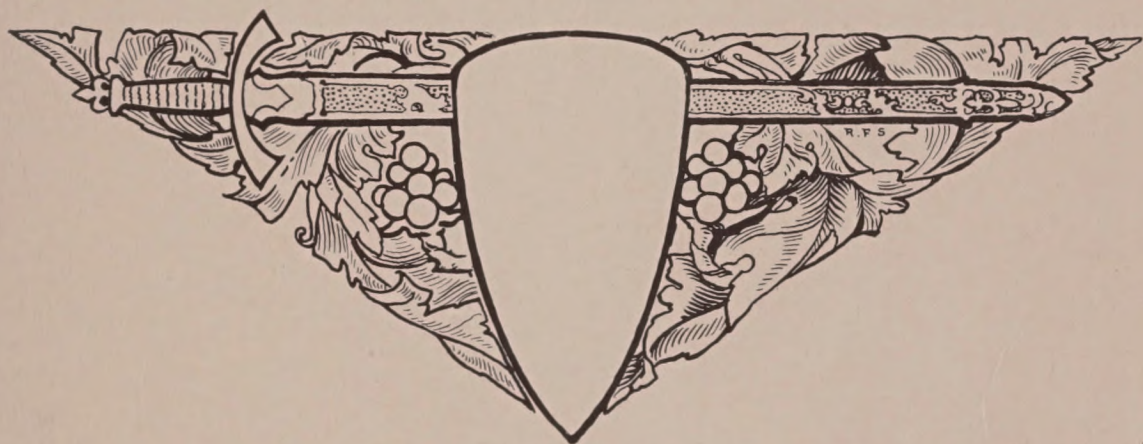
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The TRAGEDY OF
FRANCESCA DA RIMINI





Otis Skinner



OTIS SKINNER
PRESENTING
GEORGE H. BOKER'S *Tragedy*
FRANCESCA
D^A RIMINI

WITH AN APPRECIATION BY
LYMAN B. GLOVER

RALPH FLETCHER SEYMOUR
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The STORY of RIMINI

*"A thousand more he show'd me, and by name
Pointed them out, whom love bereaved of life."*

—INFERNO, Canto V.



whose Inferno Leigh Hunt aptly describes as "a sublime nightmare," became human and sincere at one moment during that gruesome and awful journey through the nether

world of his own imagination, which he undertook, accompanied by laurel-crowned Virgil. The episode of Francesca and Paolo, which has been appropriately recognized as "the most cordial and refreshing in the whole of

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THE KISS
DANTE
GABRIEL
ROSETTI



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that singular poem," arrests, for a moment, the storm-tossed procession of horrors which the poet is describing. Drifting by, with others of their kind—Helen, Achilles, Tristan, Isolde, Paris, and Cleopatra in the mournful company—the sorrow-beaten souls of the Rimini lovers come into view. Whereupon Dante, with the terror of the scenes which he had just witnessed transformed, for the moment, into gracious compassion, tenderly invites speech, and begs to know the cause of their sad downfall and ceaseless punishment. The two-score lines of confession which Francesca forthwith utters in trembling and broken accents, her lover moaning piteously the while, provide the basis and inspiration, although not the detailed source, of all the varied efforts in which the fancy of poets, painters, and dramatists has preserved and idealized the sad fate of the ill-starred princess of Ravenna. As to a father-confessor she thus recites the primal cause of all her grief:

I will do
As one who weeps and tells her tale. One day
For our delight we read of Lancelot,

The TRAGEDY OF

FRAN-
CESCA,
PHOTO
BY THE
GAINS-
BOROUGH
STUDIO,
LONDON



FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

How him love thrall'd. Alone we were, and no
Suspicion near us. Oft-times by that reading
Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue
Fled from our alter'd cheek. But at one point
Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,
The wished smile so rapturously kiss'd
By one so deep in love,—then he, who ne'er
From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kiss'd. The book and writer both
Were love's purveyors. In its leaves that day
We read no more.

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SO slight a germ as this, certified by Dante, sprouting in the soil of Italian romance, cherished and developed by Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Tassoni, and nurtured, ages later, by the poesy of Leigh Hunt, blossomed out in the nineteenth century into plays of exalted consequence written by Silvio Pellico, George H. Boker, and Stephen Phillips. Not even the crowding centuries could crush out the sympathy inspired by this love unto death.

THE pathos of human suffering, the agony of a wicked but resistless love, the piteous entanglements of an ill fortune that mismates the eagle with the linnet, the hawk with the nightingale, the

The TRAGEDY OF

LANCI-
OTTO,
PHOTO
BY
INGLIS



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irony of a fate that unites inharmonious souls, and then, flinging down the barriers, invites the victims to an alluring but guilty paradise,—this, and all this, has contributed the one touch of nature that preserved the story of Francesca through the long ages. It matters not if some part of the tear-stained tale was born in the imagination of the poet, yet the Guineveres and the Francescas blot with tears all the pages of history, and stand as sad examples along life's highway. No ray of the pale moon that does not fall upon one of their weeping sisters. The poet Dante, fired by the tale of Lancelot, may have fitted that incident of Malatesta's court at Rimini to a like setting in a frame of sorrowful romance. The parallel runs close enough to suggest more than an accidental coincidence. Yet Dante lived at the court of the heroine's father, Count Guido Novello de Polenta, in Ravenna, not long after this sentimental episode is known to have taken place. With a youthful, eager and poetic soul he drank in the romantic stories of the hour, listening meanwhile to war's alarums,



GARDEN SCENE

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in the midst of which he developed to the splendid stature of "The Divine Comedy." The minor historians of Ravenna confirmed the story of Francesca, and if the novelists of the time did not weave it into the web and woof of their imaginings, the difficult and delicate nature of the theme may provide a reason. Whether, as seems possible, the fate of Francesca is but a dim replica of the Arthurian legend of Guinevere and Lancelot which Tennyson has committed to a deathless fame in "The Idylls of the King," or a verity with the downfall of the lovers ascribed to reading Lancelot of the Lake, as a poetic afterthought, is a problem over which readers of tragic poetry will not disturb themselves. It is a masterpiece of association that bridges the centuries, separating Arthur's faithless wife from Francesca, who forgot her vows to Lanciotto, and that discovers a vivid but doubtless unconscious parallel between Lancelot and Paolo. Lancelot of the Lake, favorite of King Arthur among the twelve splendid knights of the Round Table! Lancelot sent

The TRAGEDY OF

PAOLO,
PHOTO
BY
BROWN-
ELL
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FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

by the king to escort his chosen queen!

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Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honor'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen;—and watched him from
the gates:

And Lancelot past away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and return'd
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.

—IDYLLS OF THE KING.

LANCELOT who wooed the expectant queen in his own behalf and broke the heart of Elaine, the “Lily Maid of Astolat,” who hung his shield in her chamber and died grieving, to float on that funeral barge in quest of her heart's love.

Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead.
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down.

—IDYLLS OF THE KING.

Thus the mythology of the sixth century, laden with the pomp and circumstance of brave knights and stirring tourneys, of fair ladies enwrapped in the glittering figment of romance, of panoplied steed and splendid armour, strikes hands at Rimini with the traditions of the thirteenth century. Lancelot



"I shall prevail about these bodies"

PAINTING BY CABANEL

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

and Guinevere emerge from the gracious mists of the past as romantic prototypes of Francesca and Paolo.

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STORY
OF
RIMINI

AS Lancelot is the King's messenger to Guinevere and woos her for himself, so Paolo goes forth to fetch a bride for his brother, Lanciotto, only to become ensnared by her charms. Lanciotto, another King Arthur in manly qualities, although unhandsome and misshapen, lays his commands upon Paolo in same sense as Arthur commissioned Lancelot many ages before.

You shall go to bring Francesca.

Pray you speak of me

Not as I ought to be, but as I am.

BOOKER'S FRANCESCA DA RIMINI.

HEREIN lies the tragedy. Flint and steel struck together by resistless fate—then comes the flame fed by reflections from the lowest depths of hell. Francesca first believing that Paolo is the bridegroom-elect and then incensed at what bears likeness of attempted deception, is

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still true to her pact. Ravenna must be saved by this alliance with Lanciotto, Rimini's conquering prince. But the messenger and not his soldier brother holds a place in her heart. And Paolo also struggles without avail against the resistless current of passion.

Since I came
Heaven bear me witness how my traitor heart
Has fought against my duty; and how oft
I wish myself in Lanciotto's place,
Or him in mine.

—BOKER'S FRANCESCA DA RIMINI.

BUT if there be a parallel between the myths of King Arthur's time and the story of Rimini, what matters it? It does not signify even though the venomous Mordred of Arthur's knights finds a reflection in Pepe, the court clown, whose cunning trapped Francesca as Mordred's creatures spied upon Lancelot and Guinevere, when—

Passion-pale they met
And greeted: hands in hands, and eye to eye,
Low on the borders of her couch they sat
Stammering and staring: it was their last hour,
A madness of farewells.

—IDYLLS OF THE KING.



FRANCESCA *and* PAOLO

*"I have made her hand
The price and pledge of Guido's future peace."*

—BOKER'S FRANCESCA DA RIMINI.



Italian writers following Dante did not neglect the story of Francesca, telling it, however, as he had, in hurried suggestion rather than with legitimate detail and ample per-

spective of literary and dramatic narrative. Petrarch mentions the lovers in his "Trionfo d'Amore" among many sad examples of calamitous passion. Tassoni, another writer whose early beginnings were cast under the fervid influence of the strange genius out of whose imagination grew the "Divine Comedy," introduced Paolo Malatesta in his "Tragic-Comic War," leading the troops of Rimini.



CATHEDRAL SCENE

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

BOCCACCIO, the most faithful and admiring follower of Dante, and chronicler of that idealized love-story in which the poet's Beatrice is the shining star, describes the fateful episode of Francesca and Paolo at greater length and with more detail than any of his fellows; and Rossi, in his history of Ravenna, provides a version of his own. Yet none of the contemporaneous writers, saving the author of "The Inferno," appreciated this incident as an inspiring theme for epic poem or dramatic verse. It was not until the weight of five centuries rested upon the dumb, ashen bones of all who had acted their part in this pathetic tragedy, that an English poet, Leigh Hunt by name, who dreamed in literary kinship with Byron, dug out of the mouldering past this tale of unhappy love, re-peopled it according to his own vagrom fancy, and gave "The Story of Rimini" to the world in such ample elaboration that its tragic value and dramatic import were perceived for the first time. Francesca, Paolo, Giovanni, the wronged brother, Guido, and other personages, among them

FRAN-
CESCA
AND
PAOLO

The TRAGEDY OF

FRAN-
CESCA
AND
PAOLO

*Mr. Skinner
(as Paolo),
Mr. Barrett,
Mr. James,
and
Mr. Rogers
in the first
production of
the play*



Dante, “the young father of Italian song,” were brought to life in the glowing meter of poesy. The tale is told in such swelling and joyous rhythm that English literature seems to

have justified itself in a labored attempt for which the early and the later Italian writers lacked either skill or courage.

THE poet introduces his epic at Ravenna with a rapturous description of Paolo’s coming to fetch his brother’s bride, and the first fateful meeting of love’s messenger with the beautiful Francesca is pictured in glowing colors and glittering phrase. The action is next transferred, with equal pomp and circumstance, to Rimini, where the catastrophe of

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love occurs, and the twain are in one sad burial blent. This excerpt amply represents the peculiar and often common-place rhetoric of Leigh Hunt, and refers to that incident of the reading wherein the lovers stumbled and fell.

FRAN-
CESCA
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As thus they sat, and felt with leaps of heart
Their color change; they came upon the part
Where fond Geneura, with her flame long nurst,
Smiled upon Lancelot when he kissed her first:
That touch, at last, through every fibre slid,
And Paolo turned, scarce knowing what he did,
Only he felt he could no more dissemble,
And kissed her, mouth to mouth, all in a tremble.
Sad were those hearts, and sweet was that long kiss:
Sacred be love from sight, whate'er it is.
The world was all forgot, the struggle o'er,
Desperate the joy—that day they read no more.

OTHER distinguished men, some belonging to the Victorian age, were inspired to write, if not in dramatic form at least in an appreciative manner of this happening at Rimini. Thomas Carlyle, the sage of Cheyne Row, to whom tender sentiment seemed an unusual impulse, not only speaks with rare sympathy of Dante the poet and Dante the man whose love for Beatrice was immortal, but is plunged into

The TRAGEDY OF

PÈPE,
PHOTO
BY
BROWN-
ELL
& PAGE



FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

the tenderest mood by thought of Francesca and the pitiful tale she told in the depths of Inferno. Of Dante's word-painting he exclaims: "Francesca and her lover, what qualities in that!" A thing woven as out of rainbows on a ground of eternal black. A small flute voice of infinite wail speaks there into our very heart of hearts."

FRAN-
CESCA
AND
PAOLO

NOR could Longfellow, antipode of Carlyle, resist the charm of this world - conquering sympathy that flows out from Dante's wondrous two-score lines of poetry, which sent this one tale flaming down through the ages. His inspired pen translated the older poet's lines into the best and most eloquent English it has yet attained. To another American, Hon. George H. Boker, belongs the proud distinction of being the first to give adequate dramatic form to this theme.

THE opening scene discloses the theme. Lanciotto must marry Francesca of Ravenna in order to cement a peace, and handsome Paolo is dispatched

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

FRAN-
CESCA
AND
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to fetch the bride. In the second act the two who should never have met are brought together, and in the third Lanciotto is betrothed at Rimini, artful Francesca insisting on the pact, to save Ravenna, and so deceiving the dwarf that he exclaims in ecstasy:

There's not a blessing in the cup of life
I have not tasted of within an hour.

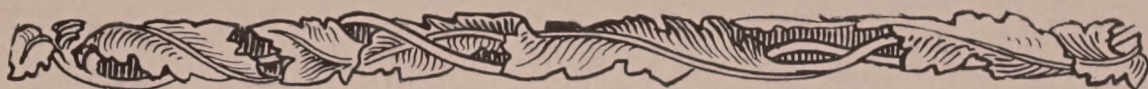
Then comes harrowing doubt, in the fourth act, as the wedding is about to occur in the great cathedral, and the hunchback mournfully declares:

Press her however cunningly I may,
She will not utter these three little words—
I love you.

Suspicion revives with the marriage, and Lanciotto rushes away to the wars, shouting to his brother in a frenzy of jealous rage: "Out of my way, thou juggler." The fifth act sweeps on through the delicious love scenes to the tragedy of the last act when the fool's revenge is complete, and the gloom of eternity settles upon the scene.

On the same night, these lovers silently
Were buried in one grave, under a tree.
There, side by side, and hand in hand, they lay
In the green ground; and on fine nights in May
Young hearts betrothed used to go there to pray.

—LEIGH HUNT'S STORY OF RIMINI.



The PLAY *and the* PLAYER

*"No light had we: for that we do repent;
And learning this the bridegroom will relent—
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now!"*

TENNYSON'S "GUINEVERE."



SKINNER is successor in trust of the brief dramatic history belonging to Francesca da Rimini in the United States. Associated with Lawrence Barrett, of enviable memory, in the first important production of Boker's remarkable play, he not only shared the honors of that event through his vivid reflection of Paolo, but is heir apparent, by reason of talent, observation and knowledge, of all the traditions and memories belonging to that dramatic incident. Beyond this inheritance, the lapse of years, golden with experience, has carried this actor to that high point of command and distinction which marks him as most

The TRAGEDY OF

"FROM
THAT
TROOP—
THEY
THROUGH
THE ILL
AIR
SPEEDING"



FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

fitting among the artists to revive the romantic tragedy of Francesca.

THE
PLAY
AND
THE
PLAYER

IT was on the evening of November 7th, 1882, and at McVicker's theater, Chicago, the opening of whose 26th season was celebrated by this event, that Boker's Francesca da Rimini was first given representation on the stage. With that thoughtful enterprise marking all his efforts in behalf of the drama, Mr. Barrett provided excellent scenes, a talented company, and that well-tempered enthusiasm which sometimes answers a worthier purpose than is achieved by an irresponsible genius who defies the conventions. The plaudits of an intelligent public rang in his ears, and for two seasons he was able to retain Mr. Boker's play in his repertory for frequent repetitions. That Mr. Skinner has elected to extend the limited history of this tragic story, and give it forth, for a time, through the medium of his own ripe knowledge, experience and gracious talent, is a favoring omen for the new season. It indicates that belief in the renaissance of the

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higher types of the drama, which has been stimulated by many successful Shakesperean and classic revivals, and was confirmed most notably by the enthusiasm attending the production of Browning's "In a Balcony," an example of tragic intensity in literary form, which borrows no aid from ordinary theatric device. Mr. Skinner's most exalted, charming and forcible impersonation of Norbert confirmed that admiring appreciation of his artistic work, which has been entertained and expressed, particularly during these recent years since his name was enrolled among the stars. It added new proof of that spontaneity and power in romantic and poetic creations which has distinguished Mr. Skinner, and marked him as one among a few who can wear the costume of courts with distinction, and lend expression and fresh beauty to the rhythm of a poetic drama. The actor who has conquered applause and gained critical commendation in characters representing all the varying moods of the great writers from comedy to tragedy—who turns from Orlando to

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PLAYER

Romeo and Hamlet, and plays Macbeth and Shylock with convincing art, may reasonably appeal to an approving public in any character upon which the dramatist has placed the stamp of special consequence. Lanciotto, in whom the characters of mediaeval romance and of poignant tragedy are so effectively combined, is an unusual type appealing with irresistible power to the acute sensibilities of such an artist as Mr. Skinner. A noble soul, gracious and splendid in his impulses, yet enduring the pain of deformity, his heart swells in the bursting of joy when Francesca's hand is placed in his, only to be plunged into the delirium of despair when the grim proof of perfidy is thrust upon him. Then comes not vengeance, but a certain eager, sorrowful determination for justice, and again a sweeping revulsion of feeling when he finds, in one moment of agony, that his dead brother was dearer to him than life.

O God! I cannot cheat myself with words!
I loved him more than heaven—more than life—
This man Paolo—this stark, bleeding corpse!
Here let me rest, till God awake us all!

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

THE
PLAY
AND
THE
PLAYER

IT is this complex but lucid character for whom our sympathies must bleed—this gentleman in deformity, this noble soul crushed under the burdens imposed by an unkind fate—whom Mr. Skinner has chosen to represent. That his engaging talent, masterful spirit, high appreciation of art values, and polished methods fit him to lead in such a notable production is the belief of a fast increasing multitude.

Lyman B. Glover.
H

Here ends this Book, designed
and published by Ralph Fletcher
Seymour, in Chicago, for
Otis Skinner
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